

MILITANT ANTI-IMPERIALISM

and

LIBERAL ANTI-IMPERIALISM: A DEMARCATION

Militant anti-imperialists tend to realize that imperialism cannot be voted out of existence; it must be stepped on, forced out, and overthrown. Militant anti-imperialists place their faith in the people, not the imperialist state—a huge fundamental difference from liberal anti-imperialists.



by
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manner of our world, we require the more accurate term, political economy. Politics and economics are intrinsically tied to each other. The military intervention invades in order to protect the economic system of exploitation and super-exploitation. In our era, the Global North exploits the Global South for its resources and to play on the grand chessboard of hegemony. This is only made possible with a powerful capitalist state.

Liberal anti-imperialists lack a clear idea of imperialism, as they limit it to military/political interventions only, leaving out the concept of economic interventions. When transnational corporations intervene in a poor and oppressed nation in order to plunder its resources, is this not a form of imperialism? The military/political intervention is dependent upon the economic intervention. In fact, the State intervenes in order to protect the economic interests of the ruthless and exploitative corporations. This fractured framework of the liberal anti-imperialists weakens their resolve in opposing imperialism. The clarity around the nature of imperialism can only strengthen the anti-imperialist movement. Drawing this line can help to offer clarity on where each one of us may stand. It helps us to develop a more effective strategy in order to defeat imperialism. Militant anti-imperialists hold true to the power of the people, to combat imperialism in an assertive yet principled manner, and to overcome the weaknesses in our strategies and tactics.

We must oppose a dogmatic application of this demarcation, while remaining true to it. Liberal anti-imperialists, at least some of them, can be shown the failures of their framework and strategy eventually winning them over to supporting militant anti-imperialist struggles. After all, were any of us born a militant anti-imperialist? No, we had to work our way up to this level of consciousness.

I want to stress the importance in one of the differences in these trends. Liberal anti-imperialists deny the existence of militant struggles against imperialism, here and abroad. This fundamental outlook leads to the whitewashing of history and current movements around the world. It explains the limitations and failures of the mainstream “anti-imperialist” movement. They disconnect from the militant struggles and, therefore, are demarcating themselves from actual and effective anti-imperialist movements. In my experience, it’s often the pacifists who are the first to censure, and even condemn, movements which choose to pick up the gun, burn a facility down, or even dress up in military fatigues. This is intrinsically tied to the idea of holding non-violence as a principle.

Is it really anti-imperialist? Anti-imperialism is just as much about opposing the Coca-Cola factory in Iraq as it is in opposing the bombs being dropped. Economic intervention is just as important as a military/political intervention. Imperialism is primarily an economic system, where the more powerful nations exploit, or super-exploit, the less powerful nations. Often it is for stealing resources, but also for other reasons like geopolitics. Nonetheless, imperialism maintains an unequal economic, cultural, and territorial relationships between nations and capitalist enterprises, often in the form of empire, based on domination and subordination of the poorer nations. We already have this demarcation between the Global North and the Global South, or in other words imperialist centers and its peripheries.

In our universities, the bourgeois academics develop the ideology for the imperialists. One method involves disassociating politics from economics. To understand more precisely and in a more holistic

The term “anti-imperialist” gets thrown around so much today that the very definition of it is muddled up. Does opposing the wars abroad make you anti-imperialist? What about the wars here at home? Are there different kinds of anti-imperialists? Can we oppose military/political interventions while supporting economic interventions? How would they be different and how can we draw lines of demarcation between these differences?

First, let’s make clear what demarcation means. J. Moufawad-Paul describes drawing clear and decisive lines of demarcation as a militant philosophical approach to distinguish between competing interpretations within “the zones of praxis through which it cuts” (Demarcation and Demystification, 2019). In a nutshell, to be as precise as possible in our understanding of our own praxis and theory, it behooves of us to draw clear and distinct lines of differences between particular strategies and interpretations.

In his book, *Philosophy of Antifascism: Punching Nazis and Fighting White Supremacy* (2020), Devin Zane Shaw draws a clear line of demarcation between militant anti-fascism and liberal anti-fascism. This book provided a clear framework for me to apply the same to the anti-imperialist movement.

The term “militant” is another word which gets thrown around a lot. Today, it’s often associated with unnecessary violence, an incorrect connotation of the term due to liberal propaganda. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. practiced militant non-violence. We can confidently say that a militant is someone who is willing to face antagonistic contradictions head on. Whether a militant uses the tactic of non-violence or armed struggle to face an antagonistic enemy is not the question, as both are militant. A labor strike can be militant. A sit-down protest can be militant. Anyone can be militant as long as they are willing to face their oppressors.

In order to understand anti-imperialism more clearly, we must demarcate a split within anti-imperialism itself. The two main trends

within any anti-imperialist movement are militant anti-imperialism and liberal anti-imperialism. Both types of anti-imperialisms stand against imperialism, undoubtedly. Yes, I believe liberal anti-imperialists genuinely want to end imperialism; it is just that their framework of understanding imperialism is incorrect, and therefore their strategy to end imperialism is most certainly wonky. This wonky framework and strategy that liberal anti-imperialism uses could potentially lead down the road of capitulation to the imperialists, which is one reason we need to draw a line of demarcation between liberal and militant anti-imperialism. Wherever liberal anti-imperialists fail, militant anti-imperialists can pick up the ball and continue pushing forward.

Liberal anti-imperialism tends to funnel resistance back towards the institutions that are practicing imperialism, mainly the capitalist State. Essentially, they believe this State is neutral, and that it can be won over to an anti-imperialist line. Those familiar with Marxist history, especially V.I. Lenin's work in *State and Revolution*, understand the capitalist-imperialist state can never be won over, as it is ultimately tied by a thousand threads to the capitalists and imperialists. So, liberal anti-imperialists are essentially begging a body of parasites to stop being parasitic. This is akin to requesting a human to stop drinking water or for the Earth to stop revolving around the Sun.

The liberal anti-imperialists tend to denounce nearly all militant forms of resistance to imperialism, such as People's Wars in the Global South, when Black and brown people destroy property or march with weapons—anything they construe as “too far” or “too militant.” In the end, liberal anti-imperialists adhere to a faith in the institutions of government. Much of their faith relies on voting imperialism out of existence. The typical pattern for them is to not only denounce imperialism, but also to stigmatize the militant anti-imperialists. How can one say no to the oppressor but also say no to the oppressed? Anyone who opposes liberal ways must be opposed themselves; this is the liberal mentality.

A fundamental and detrimental mistake made by liberal anti-imperialists

is taking the tactic of non-violence and upholding it as a principle. This is the reason why liberals sit on the sideline as people are murdered in the street and bombed by drones from the sky. Kwame Ture taught us a valuable lesson in a speech where he said,

“We must not confuse tactics with principles. This is an error that Dr. MLK made, and it also helps to confound the error. Dr. King took non-violence, which is a tactic, and made it a principle. Being an honest man he came to compound his error because being an honest man he couldn't compromise this principle, so he was forced to say ‘at all times, under all conditions, we must use non-violence.’ Malcolm X was correct. Malcolm said ‘non-violence can only be a principle in a non-violent world,’ as MLK's death came to prove.”

Kwame Ture, speech at Florida International University, 1992

Militant anti-imperialism uses direct action and does not rely on the capitalist State for any kind of policy change. We support movements who practice revolutionary militancy. We understand the necessity of fighting back physically in order to defend ourselves from the horrors of imperialism. Militant anti-imperialists tend to realize that imperialism cannot be voted out of existence; it must be stepped on, forced out, and overthrown. Militant anti-imperialists place their faith in the people, not the imperialist state—a huge fundamental difference from liberal anti-imperialists.

The purpose of demarcation here is to force open the terrain of a radical, even revolutionary, militant left that goes beyond a parliamentary struggle. Also in doing so, we can mark the terrain for effective movement building. Despite having some gains in exposing the brutality of imperialism, liberal anti-imperialism will ultimately fail. When it does fail, a militant anti-imperialist movement will offer a new option for people to compete against this failure.

We should not transform this non-antagonistic relationship between militant anti-imperialists and liberal anti-imperialists into an antagonistic one. Many of the liberal anti-imperialists can, and should, be won over.